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## Location and Nature of Arab Tribes

Beyond a shadow of doubt, the biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ obviously represents a complete picture of the magnificent Divine Message that he communicated in order to deliver the human race from the swamp of darkness and polytheism to the paradise of light and monotheism. An image, authentic as well as comprehensive, of this Message is therefore only attainable through careful study and profound analysis of both backgrounds and issues of such a biography. In view of this, a whole chapter is here introduced about the nature and development of Arab tribes prior to Islam as well as the circumstantial environment that enwrapped the Prophet's mission.

### Location of the Arabs

Linguistically, the word "Arab" means deserts and barren land without water and vegetation. Ever since the dawn of history, this term has been used for the Arabian Peninsula and its people.

The Arabian Peninsula is enclosed in the west by the Red Sea and Sinai, in the east by the Arabian Gulf, in the south by the Arabian Sea, which is an extension of the Indian Ocean, and in the north by old Syria and part of Iraq. The area is estimated between one million and one million and three hundred thousand square miles.

Thanks to its geographical position, the peninsula has always maintained great importance. Considering its internal setting, it is mostly deserts and sandy places, which has made it inaccessible to foreigners and invaders, and allowed its people complete liberty and independence through the ages, despite the presence of two neighboring great empires.

Its external setting, on the other hand, caused it to be the center of the old world and provided it with sea and land links with most nations at the time. Thanks to this strategic position, the Arabian Peninsula had become the center for trade, culture, religion and art.

## Arab Tribes

Arab peoples have been divided according to lineage into three groups:

1. **Perishing Arabs:** The ancient Arabs, of whose history little is known, and of whom were 'Ad, Thamud, Tasm, Jadis, Emlaq and others.

2. **Pure Arabs:** Who originated from the progeny of Ya'rub bin Yashjub bin Qahtan. They were also called Qahtanian Arabs.

3. **Arabized Arabs:** Who originated from the progeny of Ishmael. They were also called 'Adnanian Arabs.

The pure Arabs – the people of Qahtan – originally lived in Yemen and comprised many tribes, two of which were very famous:

a) **Himyar:** The most famous of whose ancestors were Zaid Al-Jamhur, Quda'ah and Sakasic.

b) **Kahlan:** The most famous of whose ancestors were Hamdan, Anmar, Tai', Mudhhij, Kindah, Lakhm, Judham, Azd, Aws, Khazraj and the descendants of Jafnah – the kings of old Syria.

The Kahlan tribes emigrated from Yemen to dwell in the different parts of the Arabian Peninsula prior to the Great Flood (*Sail Al-'Arim* of the Ma'arib Dam). They did this due to the failure of trade under the Roman pressure and control of both sea and land trade routes following the Roman occupation of Egypt and Syria. Naturally enough, the competition between Kahlan and Himyar led to the evacuation of the first and the settlement of the second in Yemen.

The emigrating tribes of Kahlan can be divided into four groups:

1. **Al-Azd:** Who wandered in Yemen, sent pioneers under the leadership of 'Imran bin 'Amr Muzayqiya', and finally headed to the north and the east. Details of their emigration can be summed up as follows:

Tha'labah bin 'Amr left his tribe Al-Azd for Hijaz, and dwelt between Tha'labiyah and Dhi Qar. When he gained strength, he headed for Madinah where he stayed. Of his descendants are Aws

and Khazraj, sons of Harithah bin Tha'labah.

Harithah bin 'Amr, known as Khuza'ah, wandered with his offspring in Hijaz until they came to Marr Az-Zahran. Later, they conquered the *Haram*, and settled in Makkah after having driven away its people, the tribe of Jurhum.

'Imran bin 'Amr and his family went to 'Oman where they established the tribe of Azd whose offspring inhabited Tihamah and were known as Azd of Shanu'ah. Jafnah bin 'Amr and his family, headed for Syria where he settled and initiated the kingdom of Ghassan who was so named after a spring of water, in Hijaz, where they stopped on their way to Syria.

2. **Lakhm and Judham:** Of whom was Nasr bin Rabi'ah, founder of the Manadhirah Kings of Heerah.

3. **Banu Tai':** Who also emigrated northwards to settle by the so-called Aja and Salma Mountains which were accordingly named the Tai' Mountains.

4. **Kindah:** Who dwelt in Bahrain but were expelled to Hadramout and Najd, they had no strength here as they had none in Bahrain, and so they settled in Najd. There they had an important rulership although it did not last long, for the whole tribe soon faded away.

Another tribe of Himyar, known as Quda'ah, also left Yemen and dwelt in the Samawah desert on the borders of Iraq.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Arabized Arabs go back in ancestry to their great-grandfather Abraham (عليه السلام) from a town called "Ar" near Kufah on the west bank of the Euphrates in Iraq. Excavations brought to light many details of the town, Abraham's family, and the prevalent religions and social circumstances.

It is known that Abraham (عليه السلام) left Ar for Harran and then for

[1] For the details of these tribes and their migration routes, see the following: *Nasab Ma'd wal-Yaman Al-Kabir*, *Jamharatun-Nasab*, *Al-'Iqdul-Farid*, *Qala'idul-Juman*, *Nihayatul-Arab*, *Tarikh Ibn Khaldun*, *Saba'ikudh-Dhahab* and others among the many different historical references for these migrations and their causes. After going through all of these references we have mentioned here what is most preferred in the light of the proofs.



Palestine, which he made headquarters for his Message. He wandered all over the area.<sup>[1]</sup> When he went to Egypt, the Pharaoh tried to do evil to his wife Sarah, but Allâh saved her and the Pharaoh's wicked scheme recoiled on him. He thus came to realize her strong attachment to Allâh, and, in acknowledgment of her grace, the Pharaoh rendered his daughter Hagar<sup>[2]</sup> at Sarah's service.

But Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham ﷺ as a wife<sup>[3]</sup> and Abraham returned to Palestine where Hagar gave birth to Ishmael ﷺ. Sarah became jealous of Hagar and forced Abraham to send Hagar and her baby away to a plantless valley in Hijaz, by the Sacred House, exposed to the floods from the north and south.

He chose for them a place under a lofty tree near the upper side of the Mosque in Makkah, where neither people nor water were available, and went back to Palestine leaving a leather case with some dates and a vessel of water with his wife and baby. Before long, they ran out of both food and water, but thanks to Allâh's favor water gushed forth to sustain them for sometime. The story of the Zamzam spring is well known to everybody.<sup>[4]</sup>

Another Yemeni tribe—Jurhum the Second—came and lived in Makkah upon Hagar's permission, after being said to have lived in the valleys around Makkah. It is mentioned in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* that this tribe came to Makkah before Ishmael was a young man while they had passed through that valley long before this event.<sup>[5]</sup>

Abraham ﷺ used to go to Makkah every now and then to see his wife and son. The number of these journeys is still unknown, but dependable historical references have mentioned four.

[1] *Tarikh Ibn Khaldun*.

[2] It is popularly believed that Hagar was a slave girl, but the great scholar and writer Qadi Muhammad Sulaiman Mansurpuri has indeed verified that she was not a slave but in fact the daughter of Pharaoh. (*Rahmatul-lil-'Alamin* 2/36, 37; *Tarikh Ibn Khaldun* 2/177).

[3] See *Rahmatul-lil-'Alamin* 2/34. For the detailed story see *Sahih Al-Bukhari* 1/474.

[4] See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, the Book of the Prophets 1/474, 475 (nos. 3364, 3365).

[5] See *Sahih Al-Bukhari* 1/475 (no. 3365).

Allâh the Sublime stated in the Noble Qur'ân that He had Abraham ﷺ see, in his dream, that he slaughtered his son Ishmael ﷺ, and therefore Abraham ﷺ stood up to fulfill His Order:

﴿فَلَمَّا أَسْلَمَا وَتَلَّهُ لِلْجَبِينِ ۝ وَنَدَيْنَاهُ أَنْ يَتَرَهيمُ ۝ قَدْ صَدَفَتِ الرُّؤْيَا إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ ۝ إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْبَلَاءُ الْمُبِينُ ۝ وَفَدَيْنَاهُ بِذَبْحٍ عَظِيمٍ﴾

"Then, when they had both submitted themselves (to the Will of Allâh), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (or on the side of his forehead for slaughtering); and We called out to him: 'O Abraham! You have fulfilled the dream (vision)!' Verily, thus do we reward the *Muhsinun* (good-doers, who perform good deeds totally for Allâh's sake only, without any show off or to gain praise or fame, etc. and do them in accordance to Allâh's Orders). Verily, that indeed was a manifest trial – and We ransomed him with a great sacrifice (i.e. a ram)." [37:103-107]

It is mentioned in the Genesis that Ishmael ﷺ was thirteen years older than his brother Isaac ﷺ. The sequence of the story of the sacrifice of Ishmael ﷺ shows that it really happened before Isaac's birth, and that Allâh's Promise to give Abraham ﷺ another son, Isaac ﷺ, came after narration of the whole story.

This story spoke of one journey – at least – before Ishmael ﷺ became a young man. Al-Bukhari,<sup>[1]</sup> on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, reported the other three journeys; a summary of which goes as follows:

After Ishmael ﷺ became a young man, having learned Arabic from the tribe of Jurhum who loved him with great admiration and gave him one of their women as a wife, his mother died. Wanting to see his wife and son again, Abraham ﷺ came to Makkah, after Ishmael's marriage, but he did not find him at home.

He asked Ishmael's wife about her husband and how they were

[1] *Sahih Al-Bukhari* 1/475, 476.

doing. She complained of poverty, so he asked her to tell Ishmael to change his doorstep. Ishmael ﷺ understood the message, divorced his wife and got married again.

According to the most common saying, he married the daughter of Mudad bin 'Amr, chief of the tribe of Jurhum.

Once more, Abraham ﷺ came to see his son, but again did not find him at home. He asked his new wife the same previous question, upon which she thanked Allâh. Abraham ﷺ asked her to tell Ishmael to keep his doorstep (i.e. to keep her as wife) and went back to Palestine.

A third time, Abraham ﷺ came to Makkah to find Ishmael sharpening an arrow under a lofty tree near Zamzam. The meeting, after a very long journey of separation, was very touching for a father so affectionate and a son so dutiful and righteous. This time, father and son built Al-Ka'bah and raised its pillars; and Abraham ﷺ, in compliance with Allâh's Commandment, called unto people to perform pilgrimage to it.

By the grace of Allâh, Ishmael ﷺ had twelve sons from the daughter of Mudad, whose names were Nabet, Qidar, Edbael, Mebsham, Mishma', Duma, Micha, Hudud, Yetma, Yetour, Nafis and Qidman, and who ultimately formed twelve tribes inhabiting Makkah and trading between Yemen, geographical Syria and Egypt.

Later on, these tribes spread all over, and even outside, the peninsula. All their offspring became untraceable except for the descendants of Nabet and Qidar.

The Nabeteans – sons of Nabet – established a flourishing civilization in the north of Hijaz, they instituted a powerful government that spread its domain over all neighboring tribes, and made Petra their capital. Nobody dared challenge their authority until the Romans came and managed to eliminate their kingdom.

A group of investigating scholars inclined to the view that the Ghassanide kings, along with the Aws and Khazraj were not

Qahtanians but rather descendants of Nabet, the son of Ishmael, who remained in the region. Imam Al-Bukhari also inclined to this view, and Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar preferred the view that Qahtan was among the descendants of Nabet.<sup>[1]</sup>

Descendants of Qidar, the son of Ishmael ﷺ, lived long in Makkah increasing in number, of them issued 'Adnan and his son Ma'ad, to whom 'Adnanian Arabs traced their ancestry. 'Adnan is the twenty-first grandfather in the series of the Prophetic ancestry.

It was said that whenever Prophet Muhammad ﷺ spoke of his ancestry, he would stop at 'Adnan and say: "Genealogists tell lies" and did not go farther than him.<sup>[2]</sup>

A group of scholars, however, favored the probability of going beyond 'Adnan, considering the aforementioned *Hadith* to be unauthentic. They went on to say that there were exactly forty fathers between 'Adnan and Abraham ﷺ.<sup>[3]</sup>

Nizar, Ma'ad's only son, had four sons who branched out into four great tribes: Eyad, Anmar, Rabi'ah and Mudar.

These last two subbranched into several tribes. Rabi'ah fathered Asad, 'Anazah, 'Abdul-Qais, and Wa'il's two sons (Bakr and Taghlib), Hanifah and many others.

Mudar tribes branched out into two great divisions: Qais 'Ailan bin Mudar and tribes of Elias bin Mudar. From Qais 'Ailan came Banu Sulaim, Banu Hawazin, and Banu Ghatafan of whom descended 'Abs, Dhubyman, Ashja' and Ghani bin A'sur.

From Elias bin Mudar came Tamim bin Murrah, Hudhail bin Mudrikah, Banu Asad bin Khuzaimah and the tribe of Kinanah bin Khuzaimah, of whom came Quraish, the descendants of Fihr bin Malik bin An-Nadr bin Kinanah.

[1] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, *Hadith* no. 3507; *Fathul-Bari* 6/621-623. See also *Nasab Ma'd wal-Yaman Al-Kabir* 1/131.

[2] See *Tarikh At-Tabari* 2/191-194, and *Al-A'lam* 5/6.

[3] *Ibn Sa'd* 1/56, *Tarikh At-Tabari* 2/191, *Tarikh Ibn Khaldun* 2/2/298, *Fathul-Bari* 6/622, *Rahmatul-lil-'Alamin* 2/7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17.